



PRESS RELEASE
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For Immediate Release

March 29, 2005

**FORMER ORLANDO HOUSING AUTHORITY EMPLOYEE
SENTENCED TO 21 MONTHS' IMPRISONMENT**

Orlando, Florida - United States District Judge Gregory A. Presnell today sentenced Kisha Raphaell Stewart, 27, of Orlando, Florida, to 21 months' imprisonment and ordered her to pay \$219,668 in restitution for her involvement in a conspiracy to steal funds from the Orlando Housing Authority and the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development ("HUD"). The sentence also calls for Stewart to serve a three-year period of supervised release and pay a \$100 special assessment.

Stewart pled guilty on January 10, 2005 to one count charging her with conspiracy to commit an offense against the United States. According to the facts adopted by the Court at sentencing, Stewart was employed by the Orlando Housing Authority as an accountant when she conspired with other individuals to steal \$219,668 from the Authority and HUD. The thefts involved what are known as "Section 8 funds."

Pursuant to Section 8 of the United States Housing Act of 1937, HUD administers programs providing rental and utility payment assistance to low and moderate income families. Under the Section 8 programs, HUD either contracts directly with private or public

landlords to pay a portion of the market rent of qualifying tenants or enters into contribution contracts with public housing agencies. HUD pays operating subsidies to housing authorities in order to provide Section 8 financial assistance, among other things. In 2003, the Orlando Housing Authority was the recipient of such federal assistance.

Between June 2003 and December 2003, Stewart and others conspired to steal and embezzle Section 8 funds from the Orlando Housing Authority and HUD. Stewart's primary role was to use her access to the Orlando Housing Authority's computer system to change the bank account information for Section 8 landlords to bank accounts belonging to her co-conspirators. After the funds were transferred, Stewart attempted to cover-up the thefts on several occasions by changing the bank account information in the computer system back to correct bank account for the Section 8 landlord that had been used. For her participation in the conspiracy, Stewart received a portion of the stolen funds.

Stewart is one of seven defendants who have been charged in connection in thefts of Section 8 funds from the Orlando Housing Authority and HUD. The total amount of funds that were stolen by all seven defendants is over \$420,000. The other six defendants are Samuel R. Davis, Randy Jason Donawa, Courtney Escoffery, Shawana F. Glover, Leslie B. Tourner, and Brian H. Tourner. All seven defendants pled guilty prior to trial. Stewart is the second defendant to be sentenced. On January 21, 2005, Escoffery was sentenced to 30 months' imprisonment. Sentencings are scheduled for the remaining defendants on the following dates: Brian H. Tourner on May 18, 2005, Glover on May 18, 2005, Donawa on May 23, 2005, Davis on June 9, 2005, and Leslie B. Tourner on June 15, 2005.

These cases were investigated by the Office of Inspector General of the Department of Housing and Urban Development, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and the Orlando Police Department. The cases are being prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney Roger B. Handberg.